

**TOP FY 2000
Project Narrative**

See Forever Foundation

**Grant # 11-60-00026
Washington, DC**

Project Purpose

Specific Need/Problem Addressed: Shaw is a unique community in Washington, DC. It is bounded to the south and west by “Downtown” DC. To the north the diverse U Street and Columbia Heights areas of the City are experiencing a rebirth economically and culturally. But the blocks around 9th and T Streets, the home of See Forever and the Community Learning Lab, reveal a poor and isolated neighborhood. The census tracts around the Lab show a community overrun with poverty and shut off from technology. This area is 88% African American, 7% Hispanic and 5% White. 45% of the adults in Shaw never graduated from high school. 73% of the families have incomes under \$24,000 and 65% of the children live below the poverty level. The three census tracts bordering the Learning Lab are designated as Enterprise Zones by the City (using federal guidelines). See attachment A for a map of Shaw, the Lab and the surrounding blocks. Zachaes Free Clinic, one of our community partners, estimates that over 120 individuals who are homeless or living in shelters reside within blocks of the Lab. Emmaus, another of our community partners, estimates that over 550 elderly people live within 5 blocks of the Lab, most of them below the poverty level. Police reported 18 arrests within two blocks of the Lab during the month of February.

These demographics suggest a general need for investment in Shaw. But the community is particularly in need of ShawNet and the Learning Lab. There is no open access computer/technology center in eastern Shaw. So, although the suburbs, downtown (and now even the newly planned technology corridor which is just north east of Shaw), make the DC area one of the wealthiest communities and one of the leading technology centers in the nation, Shaw residents have no where to turn if they want to learn how to use a computer or the Internet. But it gets worse. There also is very little in the way of technology infrastructure. Our preliminary survey suggests that less than 1/3 of the nonprofit agencies in Shaw have a website, while less than 1/4 of the small businesses do. Further, fewer than 1/5 of the homes have a computer or use the Internet. (See attachments B and C). This lack of technology resources leaves the community with a fractured social service delivery model, high transaction costs, poor visibility. Our Technology-based Solution: ShawNet and the Learning Lab will provide the technology infrastructure necessary to help area residents and institutions tackle the problems addressed above.

The Lab will provide high-quality technology training to area residents. Manna, for example, runs a nonprofit temp agency. Almost all of the temps, though, need additional technology training in order to obtain well-paying positions. See Forever will offer a series of classes and workshops specifically designed to train the temps in the skills the downtown legal/business community demands. Related, the See Forever Back Pack Technology program will bring computers and technology directly to homebound elderly. See the *Innovations* Section below for a more in-depth description of this program.

The ShawNet project will create an integrated and up-to-date WAN and set of websites designed to bring Shaw businesses and nonprofits into the 21st Century, increasing the flow of both capital and resources into the community and enabling neighborhood residents to access quality support networks in real-time. For example, if a teen parent without healthcare comes to Zachaes because she needs emergency care, counselors at Zachaes will be able to offer her advice,

connect her immediately with the Mazique Center, our local day care center, help her to sign up on the spot to get her child insured, and contact local programs offering night school or alternative degree programs for teen mothers. No longer will Zachaas simply have to provide her with an emergency check-up and hand her a piece of paper with a list of phone numbers for her to call. The electronic web will immediately form around the teen parent, offering her the support she needs and the opportunities she deserves.

See Forever teens, supervised by trained staff, will be primarily responsible for designing and maintaining the network and the included websites, thereby developing state-of-the-art technology skills that will enable them to transition from high school to the workplace with a set of marketable skills. Preparing inner-city teens to compete and integrate into the technology workplace is a local and national imperative. Meeting this demand is inherent in the design of the project.

Proposed Outcomes: ShawNet and the Learning Lab will positively impact our community in a number of ways, each of which is quantifiable. First, through the Lab and the Back Pack program, community residents of all ages and income will gain exposure to computing and the Internet. Second, Shaw residents will gain extensive knowledge of software, networking, and hardware, enabling them to gain employment in for-profit networking environments. Third, through ShawNet, over 50 small businesses, many historic and minority owned, will gain up-to-date websites, enabling Shaw to compete for tourists, visitors, restaurant goers. Related, over 50 nonprofits in Shaw will be able to communicate more effectively with each other, lowering operating costs, and most importantly enabling them to better serve the needs of their clients. Related, over 200 residences in Shaw will gain free access to the Internet simply by dialing directly into ShawNet. Finally, high school students, most of whom have been involved in the court system at some point, will gain immeasurable networking and business skills by taking responsibility for designing the Lab and creating and maintaining ShawNet, including the component web sites. A Preliminary Evaluation Model is attached as attachment D.

Innovation

The Back Pack Technology Program: All studies concur: it is the lower income elderly who are most shut out from technology today. Reasons for this are many, but two primary ones - a basic lack of access, compounded when old people cannot and/or fear moving around their neighborhoods, and fear of trying something so new – exist in Shaw. This project addresses both of these causes. Trained See Forever students will bring the technology to homebound seniors – in their homes or community centers - alleviating any need to travel or venture out. Students will offer a series of home workshops, ranging from the basic – how to set up an email account and send a grandson a letter – to the more sophisticated – how to order a prescription refill over the Internet. Once a senior has become familiar with the technology, students will work with them to help them purchase and set up a home computer, build a mini-lab in a nursing home or senior center, or find a way to get to the Lab.

ShawNet Services: ShawNet will provide our community with the sort of integrated communication medium currently reserved for wealthy neighborhoods or business/industrial clusters. The social service delivery network is more fractured in DC than in almost any other urban center. Because City services have deteriorated so substantially over the last decade, private nonprofit groups provide Shaw residents with many basic services that local governments provide elsewhere. These private, nonprofits have greatly improved the quality of services and programs available, but at the same time have inadvertently created a fragmented service delivery model. All of us are busy doing “our” own thing. ShawNet helps to solve this problem by “connecting” all of us immediately, and ultimately, by connecting us to District institutions such as Medicaid. Related, ShawNet will serve as sort of an “electronic” incubator to small businesses in Shaw, helping them to develop and learn to use the web to market themselves more effectively and to purchase products more efficiently. Again, larger, wealthier companies have the staff and/or resources to develop a web strategy. ShawNet will enable our companies to develop one as well.

ShawNet Training: Everyone agrees that today’s youth needs to develop technology skills in order to compete and progress in the 21st Century economy. But effective solutions are rare. The success of ShawNet will hinge, to a great degree, on the ability of our teens to continue to develop their technological skills. No one has asked a group of teens to work together to design and maintain a network of this magnitude. No one has asked them to build and maintain 100 websites. No one has offered to train them and to pay them for their work. ShawNet does. It asks students to use the skills they are learning in our Cisco Systems Networking Academy Class and the skills they are learning in our Web Design/Dreamweaver classes. Given the success that our students have had to date, we believe that they will meet and exceed our expectations here, as well. See www.seebefore.org for a glimpse of the sort of skills our students are developing.

Diffusion

The ShawNet and Learning Lab project provides an example from which other similar projects can develop. As has been widely documented, the problems identified in this proposal are, unfortunately, endemic in many urban communities. Community learning labs are starting to be developed in many lower-income communities. And they are doing immense good. (In fact, we have worked with PluggedIn in East Palo Alto in developing this project, and our students have traveled to PluggedIn over the summers to get exposed to a state-of-the-art community lab.) But they are primarily focused on teaching individuals how to use software and the Internet. We clearly intend to do this as well. However, it is just one part of what we are proposing. We are not aware of any community labs that are attempting to use technology and networking to help local individuals and institutions solve local problems as we propose to here. Some states and localities are just now starting to develop web-based programs for residents to, for example, apply for public benefits over the Internet. However, in the District, this sort of innovation is unlikely to come from the local government, without prompting from the nonprofit sector. This project will serve to jump start such an effort in DC, by establishing a well-managed pilot project. Similarly, although for-profit companies are developing sophisticated web-based “markets” to buy and sell goods and through which to market products, we are not aware of anyone attempting to create a similar infrastructure for smaller, locally-owned, undercapitalized businesses. Although we believe that what we do here at See Forever and what we propose to do through this grant is innovative, we do not believe it unreplicable by any means. Hard work, a

commitment to mission, community collaboration, extensive training, and adequate resources will make this project possible here in Shaw. The same factors could make it successful in other communities.

Over the last year, the success of See Forever students has provided us with a number of opportunities to generally disseminate information about our students' accomplishments and our program. We have testified before Congress and the City Council, and given presentations at conferences in New York, Iowa, and Florida. See Forever students and staff have spoken and given workshops at a number of prominent universities including MIT/Sloan Business School, Northwestern/Kellogg Business School, New York University Law School, Georgetown University Law Center, and University of Maryland Law School. We have appeared locally on panels at Borders Books, the Academy for Educational Development, and the US Department of Justice. Staff and students have appeared nationally on NPR, and local news stations in DC, Baltimore and New York. In addition, HBO featured a Documentary, *Innocent Until Proven Guilty*, about See Forever, as a part of its "Signature Series". These informal dissemination methods have recently been supplemented by regular electronic updates that now reach more than 300 people.

We will "formally" disseminate information about ShawNet and the Learning Lab in a number of ways. First, we will publish an electronic quarterly newsletter about the project. Second, we will select one conference per year on technology and community computing to present our project. To date, most requests for us to speak come from institutions interested in school reform and juvenile justice reform. We will leverage these contacts to establish a core of technology-based organizations and publications with whom we will communicate. In this regard, we are planning to host a conference in the spring of 2001 entitled – *Transformations: How Teens and Technology Can Transform a Computer Lab to a Community Technology Network*. The conference will be held in conjunction with our annual fundraiser, Cooking Up a Future, in order to maximize participation. See attachment E for a listing of prominent local and national politician who have participated in the fundraiser in past years.

Project Feasibility

Technical Approach: We believe that the innovation in our project is the use of technology, not necessarily in the type of technology employed. Related, given that a significant goal of the project is for See Forever students and Shaw residents to be able to develop marketable technical skills as they maintain the network infrastructure, we wanted an approach that was cutting-edge, but straightforward, appropriate for the project, and that would provide flexibility for growth and change as the scope of ShawNet develops and technology advances, but not one that is unduly complex. We will establish a WAN with the capacity to serve and provide 24-hour connectivity to each other and with the Internet to 500 end-users. The server will be a Dell Poweredge 6350 Enterprise (or similar), powered by a Pentium III 550 MHZ Processor, with 512KB Cache, redundant power supplies, 1 GB RAM, 18.2 GB SCSI hard drive, and a 100+ Ethernet Network Card. PCS and Laptops will provide the primary "access" to ShawNet and the Learning Lab. ShawNet will connect to the Internet using a T1 Line, and a Cisco 2501 Router with CSU/Dsu accessories. The network will be supported by fiber optic backbone cabling.

Qualifications: Over the last two years, we have developed a reputation for being the best run school and job training program for at-risk teens in the City. The progress of our students and our program has earned us significant media and institutional exposure. We have grown over 2.5 years from an uncertified academic program with a budget of \$250,000 working with 15 students, to program with a budget of \$1.2 million, working with 5 students, running a public charter school, two nonprofit businesses, and providing 24-hour programming for 16 students. See attachment F to review recent news articles about See Forever. Resumes of key staff members are available at attachment G. But briefly, project leadership includes David Domenici, our principal and Executive Director, who is a graduate of Stanford Law School, is an Echoing Green Fellow, a member of the Washington Post's Principal's Leadership Institute, and recently has been selected to sit the 12-person nationwide board, "School Leaders: Developing and Maintaining Leadership," funded by the Department of Education; Gail Williams, our Director of Technology, who is a graduate of Penn State University and Bank Street College, currently administers our WINNT 4.0 SP4 Server, troubleshoots network and workstation problems for our 30-computer LAN teaches our Cisco Systems classes, and is a Certified Cisco Networking Academy instructor; and Janna Wuckland, our current Webmaster/Student Instructor, who has expertise in Macromedia Dreamweaver 2.0, Adobe Photoshop 5.0, Adobe Pagemaker 6.0, BBEditor, QuarkExpress, Macromedia Flash and Adobe Illustrator 8.0, and is a graduate of the University of Michigan, with dual degrees in English and Art. Our current Tech Shop students are proficient in Macromedia Dreamweaver 2.0, Photoshop 5.0, Adobe Pagemaker 6.0, Microsoft Word 97, Microsoft Excel 97 & Microsoft PowerPoint; they perform routine and preventative maintenance on CPUs and the LAN; they install hardware devices (adding RAM, floppy drives, NIC cards) and software; they have developed and taught our "Introduction to Computing and the Internet Class" to parents and other teens; they have designed our See Forever website (www.seeforever.org).

Budget, Implementation, Timeline

Budget: Our projected overall budget for the first 36 months of the Community Lab and ShawNet is approximately \$948,000. On the expense side, three main components make up the bulk of the budget. Hardware & software needs, personnel, and contractual services. The hardware and & software budgets decrease significantly in the out years, and end up comprising approx. only 6% of the three-year budget. The large up front costs are due to the need to purchase computers and networking equipment, but as indicated in the budget, these costs fall dramatically in years two and three. Our personnel budget comprises 78% of the budget overall. In order to make the Lab and ShawNet work to their potential, they need to be well-staffed, by highly trained individuals. Of note, approx. 85% of the overall personnel costs are for wages paid to teens and their direct supervisors. The teens will design and maintain the network (with an adult supervisor), will design and maintain the component websites (again with an adult supervisor), and will provide direct instruction to Shaw residents. We believe these costs are very efficient. For approximately \$7.00-\$8.00 per hour, teens will be getting trained and providing extremely expensive services (network maintenance, web design, computer instruction) for individuals and institutions who cannot afford private sector rates. Contractual services are critical to ensure that we will have a highly trained staff and that our initial network infrastructure is set up in the most appropriate manner given our future goals and likely technological innovations.

These costs are supplemented by a number of volunteers or below market rate staff, provided through partnerships with local and national institutions including the Foster Grandparent Program, VISTA, and See Forever volunteers. Additionally, we think it important to note that See Forever and our partners have proposed to fund approx. 60% of the project's overall costs. A list of See Forever supporters, including the institutions who have pledged or contributed to our technology plans can be found at attachment H.

Implementation and Timetable: We are moving from our current site to our permanent home at 9th and T Streets in July of this year. During the fall, a number of See Forever students will continue to train extensively on web design and network systems operation. In addition, students working with our local partners will canvas Shaw to firm up local technology priorities. Students will also identify the first 25 nonprofits and 25 for-profits to participate in the ShawNet project. We will open up the Learning Lab in September. During September and October, the Learning Lab will be open and we will focus primarily on technology training for individuals and institutions. Students will begin working to develop ShawNet and to develop sites for our first 50 websites during the fall/winter of 2000-2001. ShawNet will go on-line in January/February 2000. During the spring months, up to 50 additional websites will come on-line. Between January/February and June/July, 2001 approximately 200 individuals will gain networking accounts (and Internet access) through ShawNet (possibly by lottery or some similar mechanism. By the summer of 2001, the Lab and ShawNet will be fully operational.

Sustainability: Here at See Forever, we have developed a real capacity and interest in leveraging public funds, and we will continue to do so to fund the Learning Lab and ShawNet. For example, we currently have over 180 people who volunteer here weekly (most volunteering one night per week tutoring). Similarly, we have gained the confidence of the local and national corporate and foundation communities. Our supporters include The Open Society Institute/Soros Foundation, Echoing Green Foundation, the Mobil Oil Foundation, the Walton Family Foundation, the Kimsey Foundation, Canon USA, Kodak Corporation, the Fannie Mae Foundation, and the Freddie Mac Foundation. See attachment H for a complete listing of our funders.

As the budget suggests, our need for direct federal funding will decrease steadily over the next three years. The project will increase its earning power as it gets up and running at full capacity. In addition, as we grow and develop our capacity, we will be able to better partner with local and national organizations to attract talented and dedicated individuals. See Forever is already an Americorp/VISTA site. We are authorized to hire up to 3 individuals per year, and will increase our VISTA members as our capacity to supervise and train them grows. Related, we already have a relationship with Foster Grandparents program, through which we are able to have qualified retirees work with us at no cost. We currently have one foster grandparent on staff and, again, are authorized to have 3. We also already have established a summer internship program. Related, we have applied to become a PowerUp Affiliate, which will further enable us to bring on talented individuals at low rates. We will continue to explore partnerships with other institutions as we grow and develop.

Community Involvement

Partners: At this point, we have three primary partners, and we will be developing additional ones over the coming weeks. Our current partners provide critical relationships with the Shaw community.

Emmaus is one of the largest providers of housing and related supports to the poor elderly population in Shaw. They service hundreds of elderly individuals on a regular basis. We have been in discussions for a number of months, discussing ways that we can help bring technology to the elderly in Shaw. As a part of the project, Emmaus will be responsible for conducting surveys of the seniors to get a feel for what they would like and/or need to learn about technology. Then, Emmaus will play the critical role of “introducing” See Forever teens -- and technology -- to senior citizens, by sponsoring meetings at its community center(s), and even accompanying students to the homes of senior citizens. Emmaus has agreed to provide ½ a staff person to work with See Forever on the project.

Manna, CDC is the leading community development corporation in Shaw. Manna will play a major role in helping See Forever to determine the scope and focus of the various components of the project. Over the summer, Manna will work with See Forever to further survey the community to help solidify the technology needs and wants within Shaw. Related, Manna will work with See Forever to target local small businesses to approach about joining ShawNet. Finally, because Manna runs a nonprofit temp agency, it will likely be one of the primary “clients” of the Learning Lab. Manna also has agreed to provide ½ a staff person to work with See Forever on the project. This staff person will initially primarily work on outreach and marketing to help determine community needs. See attachment I for a letter of understanding from Manna and a brief description of their programs.

Zachae's Free Clinic/Bread for the City (Zachae's) provides basic health care, mental health care, food, clothing, and increasingly, long-term counseling, to the homeless and working poor of Shaw. Because of their reputation as a provider of last resort, they see clients with all sorts of needs, many of which are beyond their scope. Currently, Zachae's tries to refer individuals to other, more appropriate agencies, but does not have any mechanism to get people in need hooked up immediately with a service provider. Further, Zachae's staff and clients waste immense amount of time and resources trying to get people registered for Medicaid and other, similar programs. By starting a pilot program with the City where individuals can sign up for these programs on-line, at Zachae's or the Lab, Zachae's believes a significant number of individuals will gain access to benefits they otherwise would not have, but for which they qualify, and that they will save immense staff resource time. In addition, Zachae's, like Manna, is faced with a client group that desperately needs to develop technology skills if they are to transition successfully to the workplace. They will work with See Forever to establish computing and technology classes for its clients. Zachae's, too, has agreed to provide ½ a staff person to work with See Forever on the project. See attachment J for a letter of support from Zachae's and a brief summary of their programs.

Note: we would like to consider the possibility of “turning over” the management of the Shawnet and Learning Lab project to the community by forming a collaborative, separately incorporated nonprofit where See Forever, Emmaus, Zachaes, Manna and other nonprofits will be represented on the board which would have its own Executive Director and staff. In the near-term, See Forever would “incubate” the project within its corporate structure, but develop, with our community partners, a strategy and timetable for the project to develop into a local, collaborative, member-based nonprofit.

Broader Community Involvement: We have developed a wide range of friends and partners here in Shaw. Our students have worked as interns at, and we have close personal and institutional ties with, over 30 institutions in Shaw, including the Afro American Newspaper, Living Stage Theater Company, Whitman Walker Clinic, Lee’s Florist, Mazique Child Care Center, Ben’s Chili Bowl, and the Children’s Studio School.

With the help of these organizations, we have conducted a preliminary needs survey to assess just what sort of technologies institutions are using and what technologies they would like the Learning Lab and ShawNet to bring to the community. The survey results reveal a community starving for a technology and networking infrastructure. Only 3 of 15 institutions surveyed even have a website. All of the participants say they would like to have a website or would like technical assistance on how to maintain and upgrade their current site. Only 4 have institution-wide access to the Internet. 11 suggest that they need but cannot afford quality staff training on basic word processing, spreadsheets and databases, and graphics. None of the nonprofits use technology to assist their target clients. All agree that the Learning Lab and ShawNet would be good for them and for the neighborhood.

As mentioned above, we will work with our community partners to expand this survey over the summer, in order to better assess what end-users in Shaw would like for ShawNet and the Learning Lab to bring to the neighborhood.

Support for end users: Throughout this narrative, we have tried to provide glimpses of how the Learning Lab and ShawNet will be used by individuals day-to-day. Below we have provided an additional example. Emmaus has conducted a survey of many of the homebound elderly in Shaw, asking them about technology and if they would be interested in learning about the Internet. Over 80% said they would like to learn to use it. But only 10% said they would likely learn how to use it on their own, or if they had to venture out to an offsite lab! Our goal will be to have our students come right to a homebound senior on a regular basis for a set period (preliminarily 3 times a week over a ten-week period). During this time the teen-teacher and the elder-student will work through a series of workshops on Windows, Word/Excel, the Internet, email, and possibly something that’s just plain fun, like Photoshop. During the class the elder-student will learn a host of technical skills and learn how to have fun with the computer (make a greeting card, or send an email greeting). Toward the end of the workshop, the teen-teacher along with a social worker from Emmaus will work with the elder-student to determine how the elder-student could use technology to help him or her day-to-day. Maybe they will figure out how to order prescriptions, or to research a family tree, or to make reservations for the holidays. Related, at the end of the 10 week workshop, the teacher, student and social worker will meet to determine how to best enable the elder-student to keep using technology – at home, at the Lab,

at a nearby senior center. As demand from Shaw seniors grows, we will work with Emmaus to find a funding partner who will support the costs of the computer acquisitions, enabling seniors to purchase computers and related equipment for little or no cost.

Evaluation and Documentation

We are committed to a two-prong evaluation: one of the project's "process" and the other of the project's "progress". We are committed to working with our partners, other community-based institutions, and local individuals to develop the ultimate scope and direction of the project. The "process" evaluation will focus on this aspect of the project. In addition, we are committed to evaluating the progress that various stakeholders in the project make through their participation in the project. We will gain baseline data on all individuals and institutions involved in the project, and then use friendly but comprehensive and consistent ongoing evaluations to determine how the project and its participants are doing. We have documented carefully the accomplishments of our students to date; and these results have been a major reason funders continue to support our program. We aim to continue, and improve upon our evaluation during this project.

We will develop baseline data, establish expected/anticipated outcomes, and then track actual accomplishments in a number of areas. We outlined a number of these in the section on "Proposed Outcomes." So, for example, we will evaluate the number of seniors exposed to technology, the skills they learn, and the extent to which they use technology once their "training" is completed. Similarly, we will assess the skills that residents learn at the lab, and the number of residents who successfully transition to work environments where they can leverage these acquired skills. We will document which local nonprofits and small businesses have websites and how they use them before this phase of the program, and then track the development and use of the websites among our target audience. Related, we will evaluate whether in fact client nonprofits and small businesses use the Web effectively to reduce operating and related costs. We will monitor registration, and the use of ShawNet by community members. Finally, we will measure the skills the high school student employees gain through their work on the project. We have provided, at attachment K, an example of the sort of evaluations that we have undertaken over the last two years.